



Florida Cabinet Supports Sanctuary Management Plan

Fritz Wettstein, FKNMS Lower Region Manger



At the annual lobster education booth, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Officer Rob Beaton teaches a youngster and his father about lobster biology and the regulations that apply to this important species. Outreach education and law enforcement are only a few of the tools that are used to manage the natural and cultural resources of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

At the August 27, 2002 Cabinet Meeting in Tallahassee, Florida Governor Jeb Bush and the other Florida Cabinet members accepted the Sanctuary's five-year report on management plan implementation. In doing so, the Cabinet concurred that the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Final Management Plan is providing the protection for which it was designed. This was a critical step in the plan review process, signaling Florida's continued strong support for the direction of the Sanctuary's management efforts.

The Cabinet was well prepared for accepting the report. Cabinet members received a thirty two page summary of sanctuary activities and the fifth annual status report, viewed a short power point slide of accomplishments and heard testimony from sanctuary supporters. Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) member Nancy Klingener read a SAC resolution commending cabinet support for the Sanctuary. David White, representing The Ocean Conservancy, presented an acrylic sculpture containing a commemorative inscription recognizing Cabinet actions on the Sanctuary Management Plan and Tortugas Ecological Reserve. State of Florida officials supporting the Sanctuary included Department of Environmental Protection Secretary

David Struhs, new Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Director of Law Enforcement Julie Jones and Lower Region Manager Fritz Wettstein. Sanctuary Superintendent Billy Causey provided a status report on the management plan revision.

This summer marked the fifth year of management plan implementation. The five-year time period coincides with NOAA requirements for sanctuary management plan review/revision and the Florida Governor and Cabinet's requirement of comprehensive evaluation. The evaluation and an annual report are two of the conditions specified by the Governor and Cabinet in its 1997 adoption of the management plan. Public review of the draft plan has been scheduled for the early 2003. The new five-year plan will include two proposed regulatory changes that extend into federal waters protections that already exist in state waters. The first will extend no discharge zone protection into sanctuary federal waters. The second will extend the prohibition on underwater fish feeding.

Five-Year Management Plan Highlights:

- More than 80% of action plans have been completed or are successfully ongoing.
- Tortugas Ecological Reserve has been established as the largest fully protected marine reserve in the states.
- Enforcement has increased from 7 to 17 FWC law enforcement officers.
- Mooring buoy and Team OCEAN programs assist boaters in protecting coral reefs.
- Spiny lobster and several reef fish are larger and more numerous in marine reserves.
- World renown monitoring program has documented trends in corals, seagrasses and water quality.
- Five large vessel grounding sites and seven small ones have been restored.

*Note: This article appeared in the Fall 2002 issue of the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, **Sounding Line**. For more information, visit: floridakeys.noaa.gov.*